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ABSTRACT

A discussion of teacher evaluation offers a definition and rationale, and explains a few of its traditional forms. Common uses of teacher evaluation for personnel management, accountability, and improvement of teaching are described, and a distinction is made between formative and summative types of evaluation. Teacher evaluation, often based on observation with little discussion, and student ratings, often provided in the last few minutes of a class, may both gather useful information but may be more useful when combined. Tension between teachers and administration may also affect evaluation, sometimes alienating one or both parties. Traditional methods of teacher evaluation include classroom observation, peer observation, self-evaluation, and student ratings. The last of these has grown in popularity, but can be abused and have potential for bias or inadequacy. Increasingly, portfolios are used to document teaching skills and strengths, use of materials, professional growth, and reflections on teaching. It is concluded that no single method is adequate to evaluate a teacher, and that a holistic method is needed. Contains 15 reference. (MSE)

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The Complexities of Evaluating Teachers

Evaluating teachers is a controversial topic at all levels for teachers and students in the field of education. Teacher evaluation is often criticized as not being the reality of the situation or as being a biased opinion of students. What is clear is the need for teacher evaluation and the need to evaluate teachers fairly and completely. The following article will define evaluation, give reasons why evaluation is conducted and explain a few of the traditional forms of teacher evaluation.

Evaluate is defined as "to determine the worth of, or appraise" in Webster's New World Dictionary (1966). The word is synonymous with assess, valuate, account, rate, and size up. Schrier and Hammadou interpret assessment as "the accurate, objective description of performance" (Schrier and Hammadou 1994: 213). These authors continue to explain:

> In the domain of teacher education, this means measurement of the quality of teaching performance. Evaluation means placing value upon what is being measured. The attempt to separate the concept of objective measurement from subjective evaluation has been an ongoing struggle and subject of much debate within the field of educational testing. (Schrier and Hammadou 1994: 213)

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The word evaluation is dreaded and feared by teachers and students, but it is a necessary and inevitable process. School administrators need to evaluate teachers as teachers need to evaluate students in order to assess and account for the quality of education. A teacher is evaluated in order to account for the quality of a teacher who desires a tenure position, raise in salary, a higher position, or increased number of hours. Evaluation of teachers is necessary in order for the administration to make decisions concerning the faculty. Often these decisions deal with tenure, salary increase, promotion, reappointment, merit pay, awards, and faculty grants. In order to justify these decisions, evaluation is frequently a means to come to a determination. The administration may need to make a decision whether to fire or keep an individual teacher and evaluation is often the deciding factor or part of the deciding factor. Evaluation used for administrative decisions is summative evaluation while on the other hand evaluation conducted for professional growth of teachers is a formative evaluation. Seldin comments that in the past, teachers were rewarded for research but today there is a trend to reward teachers for excellence. This change shows how quality teaching has become more important; more than ever institutions and teachers must account for the education an institution is promoting. Improving institutional effectiveness is often another reason for the use of evaluations. If the teaching is not at a high level, are students and parents getting the quality education that they have paid for? Accountability is required of teachers and institutions to meet the demands of the public.

Another reason and the best reason why a teacher is evaluated is to improve the level of teaching. With evaluation, we can also understand the process of teaching and learning better, and use this knowledge to improve in the area of teaching methodology. Evaluation also gives the teachers valuable

information about their teaching which can help them in their professional development. A teacher needs to progress continually in areas that are personal to each individual teacher in hopes that the level of teaching becomes more professional. Whether a teacher has years of experience or is newly graduated, the area of professional growth continues to be developed at all times.

Evaluations are conducted at the elementary school level all the way up to the university level in all subject areas. Often these methods of evaluation, such as teacher observation, cause the teacher to be nervous which in turn does not give a true picture of what this teacher is like in a normal class. Sometimes a fellow colleague who has little preparation in the area of teacher evaluation visits another teacher's class; teachers who have many years of experience may be given this responsibility but have little idea what is necessary in evaluating their workmates. Generally these evaluations are done once at the end of the semester with little feedback given to the teacher as to how the teacher performed. Feedback given to the observed teacher consists of information about this single visit providing little input that will help the teachers in their professional growth. The traditional role of evaluation is to judge the teacher based on one class with little follow-up as to how the teacher planned the class, how the teacher felt about the outcome of the class, or what the teacher is doing throughout the semester. Teacher evaluation also consists of forms that students fill out during the last fifteen minutes of a class. These evaluations shed light on students' points of view of how a teacher manages the class. Valuable information about how a student feels about a teacher can be found in these evaluations which is useful for the teacher in the future if the teacher is given a chance to see this information. It is common that this type of information is collected only once at the end of a

course when a teacher can no longer use this information to excel in the quality of teaching for that particular class.

Both types of evaluations are helpful in the professional growth of a teacher only if they are used carefully and appropriately. Student evaluations of teachers can be coupled with a teacher evaluation done by a trained individual to give a broader, more realistic, and more complete idea of how a teacher is performing. Ideas about how a teacher feels need to be explored by both the teacher and observer before and after the visit. Communication among students, observers and teachers must remain open in order that a teacher progresses in his/her personal development in this profession.

Eustis comments on the importance of teacher evaluation with the following statement:

> Faculty evaluation is one of the key factors determining the health and happiness of an academic department. Indeed, it is essential for the smooth administration functioning and collegial interaction of a department that there be clear, consistent, and equitable published guidelines which faculty members can rely on to provide them with the standards and procedures by which they will be evaluated. (Eustis 1993: 59)

Often there is tension between faculty and administration in the area of teacher evaluation because both sides feel insecure with evaluation. Problems may easily arise if the situation is not dealt with carefully and professionally. Instead of promoting teacher development or departmental development, teacher evaluation can alienate the two groups and create a negative situation. Eustis continues to point out, "Evaluation has a direct bearing on faculty members' livelihood, likelihood of success or failure, self-esteem, and attitude toward their colleagues, their department, their

institution, and the profession itself" (Eustis 1993: 60). Teacher evaluation is essential in education but must be carried out carefully in order to foster a positive attitude instead of a negative one.

A few of traditional methods of teacher evaluation include: classroom observation, peer observation, self-evaluation, and student ratings. Classroom observation, a frequent method used to evaluate teachers, often consists of a school administrator visiting a class unannounced. Teachers dread these visits and feel threatened by this method unless a careful plan of action is taken while observing the teacher. Preconference and post conferences are important for both the teacher and the observer in order to communicate what will be observed, how the teacher will be observed, and how successful these goals were obtained. The teacher's intentions need to be stated in the preconference to help clarify what will be observed. Avoiding judgments about observations and keeping an open mind of what takes place in the classroom is recommended to the observer. The observer should fake care while observing so as not to draw attention to the observer. One visit does not give a complete idea of the teacher and the performance of this teacher. The observer should be highly trained in this area and sensitive to the observed teacher's feelings.

Classroom observation and peer observation are similar in that both of these methods observe a class. While the classroom observation is usually conducted by a school administrator, the peer observation is conducted by a fellow colleague who observes and reports back about the observation. Peer observation, or peer coaching, is less threatening but is not appropriate for summative evaluation. Support is provided to teachers who are new or in need of feedback about their teaching. Trust between the two groups fosters communication which can aid in the development of the teacher and program

as a whole. Time is required for this type of evaluation along with support from both sides. If done properly, both can achieve good rapport which fosters trust and communication in an institution.

Self-evaluation is defined by Nunan as, "the encouragement of self-analysis and evaluation by teachers of their own classroom work as a means of professional self-development" (Nunan 1989: 147). Richards and Lockhart add to this definition with, "one in which teachers and student teachers collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching" (Richards and Lockhart 1994: 1). Self-evaluation promotes reflective thinking and growth in the area of education through the use of self-rating forms such as Medley's (Medley 1980: 136-143), self-reports, peer observation, the use of videotape or audiotape, and self-study materials. Self-evaluation enhances the long term outlook of the teacher, promotes responsibility, modifies teaching practices and encourages high standards in education, but this method is criticized for its lack of reliability when used for administration decisions. Assistance of colleagues or supervisors should be given to teachers who have a need for feedback and guidance.

Lastly, student ratings of teachers have been the largest traditional means of evaluation since the early 1920's and have grown in popularity. The reasons for this tremendous increase include: ease in administration and scoring, valuable information gained from these ratings, and popularity among administrations. Students provide helpful information concerning rapport, communication, teacher effectiveness and quality of the instructor. Pennington and Young compare student ratings to teacher evaluation with: "student evaluations of teachers are a form of classroom observation, where

the observers are students rather than administrators or teachers" (Pennington and Young 1989: 626).

What is also important to remember is that these student ratings can often be abused according to Seldin. Are the questions of the student ratings appropriate and do they ask for information about the teacher that students can answer? Are these ratings the only source of information about the quality of teaching? Careful procedures for the administration of student ratings must be carried out. The teacher who is being rated must be absent at the time of administering student evaluations and the environment must be appropriate. Students need to be informed what these ratings are for. In order that the results of these ratings be viable, 75 per cent of the class must complete these ratings. If these ratings are used to promote quality teaching, the teacher should be able to view the outcome and at a time when something can still be done in the classroom to remedy problems. Student ratings need to be taken over a period of time in order to get a better overall idea of what a teacher is like. If these ratings are not shown to the teacher at an opportune time, then these ratings will not benefit the promotion of quality teaching.

Student bias is frequently thought of with the mention of student ratings. Class size, educational level, students' academic field and ability, gender of student and teacher, and amount of work assigned in the class are just a few of the suggested reasons for bias. However, extensive research shows few serious problems with bias. Moss remarks about student bias with the following:

> Research indicates that students are competent to evaluate faculty, that student evaluations are not biased by the sex of the teacher, that a teacher's 'ability to teach' or 'ability to communicate' are positively related to student ratings, and that

> the results are as reliable (self-consistent) as our better educational and mental tests. (Moss 1971: 17)

Pennington and Young comment on the "evidence of their (student ratings) stability, even in the long-run," as studies show "a high positive relationship between the judgments made by students who had been away and those made by students who were currently taking the course" (Pennington and Young 1989: 627). Both of these statements confirm that student evaluations are reliable and valid as evaluation measures.

Student evaluations let students voice their opinions about their teachers, expressing whether they feel their teachers have done an adequate job of teaching. Often these ratings are the only way institutions evaluate teachers, however Seldin, Wennerstrom and Heiser all agree that this method is not the only way to evaluate teachers but should be used with other means of evaluation. These three authors feel that student ratings are important and helpful in teacher evaluation but that students are not able to judge all the aspects of a teacher.

Seldin recommends the use of student ratings as part of portfolios which is a current trend in the area of education. Seldin states, "The best way that I know of to get at both the complexity and individuality of teaching is the teaching portfolio, which also is becoming increasingly popular around the country" (Seldin "The Use and Abuse of Student Ratings" 1993: 40). Seldin states portfolios:

> include not only students' ratings of the professor but evidence of students' learning in his or her classes, such as students' essays and publications, field work or lab reports, or conference presentations on course-related work. Other components can include other teachers' observations of

> the instructor's teaching, reviews of the instructional materials used in classes, and an essay by the faculty member reflecting on why he or she teaches in a particular way. (Seldin "The Use and Abuse of Student Ratings" 1993: 40)

This definition gives precise and current information on how to create a more extensive type of teacher evaluation. The components can be changed or adapted according to how the teacher feels and whenever the teacher desires. Moore adds to Seldin's definition stating portfolios are "goal based, show reflection, contain samples of work, contain evidence of growth, span a period of instruction, allow for reflection, feedback and improvement, and are flexible and versatile" (Moore 1994: 170-171). Another definition states portfolios as a "factual description of a professor's strengths and teaching achievements. . . documents and materials which collectively suggest the scope and quality of a professor's teaching performance (Seldin, The Teaching Portfolio 1991: 3). Other components may include any documentation that describes accomplishments and strengths of a teacher such as documentation including information about professional groups, course syllabi, professional journals, statements from department heads or students. Examples of statements can be included from a variety of sources such as the department head, students commenting on the teacher, and colleagues that have been influenced by the teacher or have observed the teacher. Selection of documents is important and should not include a large number but a selection that is "orderly, efficient, and persuasive" (Seldin, Successful Use of Teaching Portfolios 1993: 3). Selection of components does not include an immense number of documents but a selected number that gives evidence of the abilities of the teacher. Each portfolio differs in content, organization, and approach. The capabilities, opinions, philosophies

and teaching skills should be represented with documents. One can notice that a lot of the methods of evaluation have been incorporated in the components of a portfolio. No single method is sufficient to evaluate a teacher but a number have been coupled together to create a more complete idea of what the teacher is.

A need exists for a holistic evaluation of teachers which not only will meet the demands of the administration but also meet the needs of all students and teachers in their search of professional growth. If these requirements are achieved in a complete teacher evaluation program, teachers will be better prepared and more successful while at the same time more comfortable with the idea of teacher evaluation.

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